Government in terming our Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's recent meeting with the reverent Dalai Lama as Delhi's interference in China's internal affairs; and

(b) whether there has been any Chinese reaction to the deep resentment expressed by our Ministry of External Affairs spokesman on this statement of China?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) In keeping with past practice, His Holiness the Dalai Lama paid a courtesy call on PM on October 15, 1998. Government through the spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs stated on October 23, 1998 that the Chinese reaction was unjustified and pointed out that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been received, in his capacity as a revered spiritual and religious personage, by successive Indian Prime Ministers. Government feels that no further action need be taken in this matter.

(b) No, Sir.

NRI Parliamentarians Conference

2090. SHRI GOVINDRAM MIRI:
SHRI PARAG CHALIHA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a convention of NRI parliamentarians, etc. was held in New Delhi, recently;

(b) if so, the decisions/resolutions adopted therein; and

(c) the stand of Government towards demand of the Antar Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) The Government is not aware of any convention of NRI Parliamentarians' held in New Delhi recently. The Government is, however, aware that the first international PIO (People of Indian Origin) Parliamentarians' Conference was held in New Delhi from November 28-29, 1998 under the aegis of Antar-Rashtriya Sahayog Parishad.

(b) The conference reportedly adopted a number of recommendations including the setting up of a permanent Association of Parliamentarians of Indian Origin; the setting up of an university for the children of People of Indian Origin; the constitution of a Department in the Ministry of External Affairs to provide assistance to People of Indian Origin; the exchange of students between India and countries with People of Indian Origin; and widening the areas of cooperation between India and these countries.

(c) Government is sensitive to the special needs of persons of Indian origin living abroad. To this end, Government will continue to provide opportunities to such persons so that their cultural, educational and commercial ties with India are nurtured and strengthened.

Foreign Missions

2091. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of foreign missions maintained by his Ministry broken down into embassies, legations, consulates and vice-consulates;

(b) the number of foreign service officers of different categories to serve these offices; and

(c) the nature of training and refresher courses organised for these personnel?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) The total number of missions abroad maintained by the Ministry of External Affairs is 157 comprising: (i) Embassies-83 (ii) High Commissions-29 (iii) Consulates-32 (iv) Others-13 (Total 157).

(b) The grade-wise number of Indian Foreign Service (IFS) Officers to serve these offices is as follows (i) Grade I of IFS -26 (ii) Grade II of IFS-34 (iii) Grade III of IFS-166 (iv) Grade IV of IFS-136 (v) Jr. Admn. Grade & Senior Scale of IFS-183 (vi) Junior Scale (including probationers)-42 (Total 587). The above figures include both officers at Missions abroad and those at Headquarters.

(c) Training and Conduct of refresher courses for IFS personnel is undertaken by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). For IFS Probationers, and 11-month intensive training

programme is organised by the Foreign Service Institute covering India's Foreign Policy, International relations, International Law, Diplomacy, International Economic and Commercial relations, Defence and Security issues, besides training in a Foreign Language (French).

Indian Scientists sent back by US

2092. SHRIMATI KAMLA SINHA:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the US has sent back a number of scientists working on various American research projects; if so, the details thereof;

(b) whether the US administration also refused Visas to Indian scientists proposing to visit America in connection with various conferences and other assignments; if so, the details thereof; and

(c) Government's reaction and response thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Seven scientists belonging to the national Institute of Standards & Technology, USA and one scientist from Argonne National Laboratory, USA were asked to leave the United States. These scientists were from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institute of Science (IIS). The visa application of Dr. Chidambaram, Chairman Atomic Energy Commission, was returned and he was informed that current US visa procedures were under review as a result of India's nuclear tests.

(c) The decision to grant a Visa is a sovereign right of the country concerned. India believes that measures such as denial of Visas undermine the generally accepted principles of free movements of scientists and the universality of science. Government does not agree with any targetted policy of denying visas, particularly those that come in the way of scientific exchange and interaction. Government has taken up this issue with the United States and will continue to pursue it.

Cell for Ayurveda in SAARC Secretariat

2093. SHRI KHAN GHUFRAN ZAHIDI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to set-up a cell for Ayurveda in the SAARC Secretariat; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

Foreign Tours

2094. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the foreign tours undertaken by different Union Ministers and Ministers of State, indicating the purpose there of, during the last nine months and the expenditure in foriegn exchange and otherwise incurred thereon; and

(b) the comparative figures of expenditure in terms of foreign exchange and otherwise during the corresponding period during the last two years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) and (b) The information is being collected and will be placed on the Table of the House.

Talks with Asean Countries

2095. DR. KARAN SINGH:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether at the last ASEAN (ARF) mee held at Colombo, Laos, Singapore and Vietnan supported India, to justify India's security concerns that led to India conducting N-Test in May this year;